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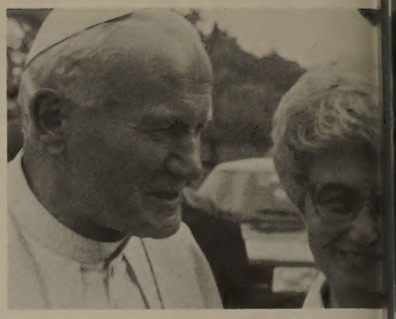

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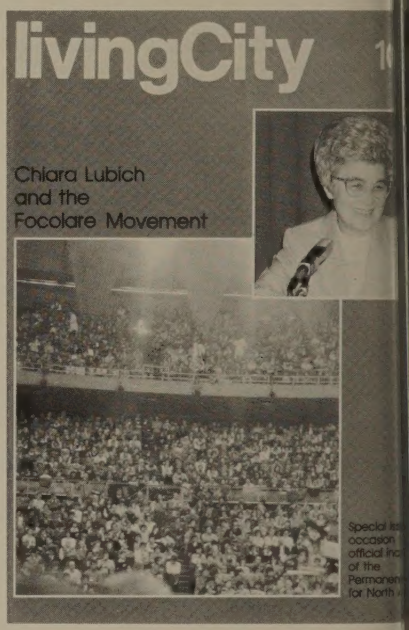

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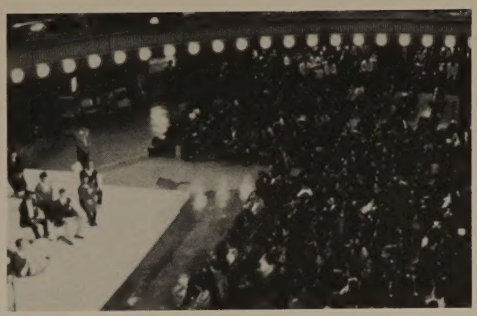
THE MORE WE LIVE THE GOSPEL ie closer we will be:" the ecumenical aspect f the Focolare.



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A SPIRIT OF UNITY

Chiara Lubich, born in Trent, Italy on January 22, 1920, is founder and president of the Focolare Movement which began in 1943. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father, "May they all be one" (Jn 17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to a unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

Today there are well over a million members of the Focolare all over the world.

On the occasion of the Inauguration of the North American Permanent Mariapolis, we would like to offer our readers a profile of the Focolare Movement. The Mariapolis Luminosa, like the other seven mini-cities around the world, (Loppiano, Italy; Ottmaring, Germany; Montet, Switzerland; Fontem, Africa; O'Higgins, Argentina; Sao Paolo, Brazil; Tagaytay, Philippines), is a concrete expression of its life. In 1972, during one of her visits to Loppiano, Chiara spoke about the role and characteristics of this first Permanent Mariapolis:

"The Mariapolis is city of life. This is why it is an original city. There are many little Christian cities in the world. It has always been the dream of those who had a strong philosophy or ideology, or a spiritual trend in the Church, to have a small city which would reflect and incarnate their ideal. And every little city which has been built, has or has had, a word to say to the world. The little cities of the Immaculate of Maximilian Kolbe, for example, keep alive devotion to Our Lady through a very intense activity, especially editorial.

The characteristic of our cities, of the Mariapolis Aurelia (Loppiano), of the Mariapolis Andrea (O'Higgins), and the Mariapolis Edna (Fontem), is life.

Logically, of course, it could not be normal life, or only somehow a Christian life. The Mariapolis is living because in it shines the One who has said of himself, "I am the life."

Since its life comes from the presence of Christ, anyone coming with a sincere heart, seeking something, will find Christ because he is here. Then faith is revived, and for those who don't have faith, it blossoms. "I believe," are the words that those who come to the Mariapolis must say."

To adequately present the life of the Movement in its forty-three years of life, it would take much more than the few pages of this magazine. This is however, an attempt to give some highlights of the spirituality which animates it, its history and its development.

We hope—with this—to make a gift to our readers and to provide information to those picking up the magazine today for the first time.

the Editor

Highlights in the history of the Focolare Movement

1943 - Chiara Lubich consecrates her life to God.

1944 - First women's Focolare house: Trent, Italy.

1948 - First men's Focolare house: Trent, Italy.
- Igino Giordani becomes first married Focolarino.

1949 - First Mariapolis (Focolare summer gathering): Italy.

1956 - The branch of the Volunteers of God begins.
- First Focolare house outside Italy: Brussells, Belgium.

1958 - First Focolare house outside Europe: Brazil and Argentina.

1959 - Last single Mariapolis in Italy: 12,000 participants.

1960 - Ecumenical center Centro Uno opens in Rome.

1961 - Inauguration of International School of Formation for Focolarini: Rome.
- First Focolare houses in North America: New York.

1962 - Pope John XXIII officially approves the Focolare Movement.

1963 - First Mariapolis in North America: New Jersey.

1964 - The official audience with Pope Paul VI. "The Pope said the Movement is a "work of God."
- Inauguration of the International School on the Focolare Spirituality for Diocesan Priests: Rome.
- Chiara Lubich visits Focolare houses in North America.
- First permanent Mariapolis founded in Loppiano, Italy.

1966 - Permanent Mariapolis begins in Fontem, Cameroon.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, receives Chiara Lubich in audience and encourages the spreading of the Movement among Anglicans.
- First Focolare houses in Asia: Manila, Philippines.
- First Focolare in Australia.

1967 - First of many audiences of Chiara Lubich with Patriarch Athenagoras I in Istanbul.
- The Gen Movement (youth section of the Focolare Movement) begins.

1968 - Chiara Lubich visits the Focolare houses in New York and Chicago. She founds the school of formation for American Focolarini.
- Mariapolis Center (center for formation in the Focolare spirituality) is inaugurated in Chicago.
- Permanent Mariapolis begins in O'Higgins, Argentina.

1969 - Inauguration of the Center of Ecumenical Life at Ottmaring, Germany.
- Permanent Mariapolis begins near Sao Paulo, Brazil.

1970 - Inauguration of the International School on the Focolare Spirituality for Women Religious: Rome.

1971 - The Gen 3 Movement begins for boys and girls from 8 to 14 years of age.

1973 - First Gen Fest: Loppiano, Italy 3,000 participants.

1974 - Mariapolis Center begins in Tagaytay, Philippines.

1977 - Chiara Lubich is awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

Piazza Cappuccini, Trent Italy: the first focolare.

One of the summer Mariapolis of North America.

- Inauguration of the International School of the Focolare Spirituality for Men Religious: Rome.
- Two Mariapolises take place in North America: Oregon and New York.

1978 - Three Mariapolises take place in North America: Washington state, New Mexico and New York.

1980 - Fourth Gen Fest: Rome. 50,000 participants.

1981 - Family Fest: Rome. 25,000 participants Pope John Paul II adresses the assembly and says: "Your spirituality is open, positive, optimistic, serene and conquering."
- Chiara Lubich is honored with the Order of Saint Augustine of Canterbury by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, for her work "within and for the Anglican Communion."
- Inauguration of Ecumenical Schools for the members of the Movement in Great Britain, Germany, and United States.
- Permanent Mariapolis begins in Montet, Switzerland.
- Chiara Lubich speaks about her Christian experience before 10,000 Buddhists in Tokyo, Japan.
- The center in Tagaytay, Philippines become a Permanent Mariapolis.
- Four Mariapolises take place in North America: Washington state, New Mexico, Wisconsin, and New York.
- The Focolare Movement in North America celebrates its twentieth anniversary at a commemorative Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, with 2,000 attending. Cardinal Cooke is main celebrant.

1982 - World congress of 7,000 priests and men religious associated with the Focolare Movement takes place in Paul VI Hall, Rome. Participants from sixty countries. Pope John Paul II addresses them and is main celebrant at Mass described as largest concelebration in history.
- Chiara Lubich founds the Focolare Schools for Dialogue with the Great Religions of Asia: Manila, Philippines.
- The "Isaiah School," a school for dialogue with the Jewish Tradition started in USA.

1983 - International congress of the New Humanity section of the Focolare Movement: Rome. Pope John Paul II addresses 20,000 participants.
- Inauguration of the Asian branch of the School on the Focolare Spirituality for Diocesan Priests: Tagaytay, Philippines.

1984 - Visit of the Holy Father to the Mariapolis Center, the international headquarters of the Focolare in Rocca di Papa (Rome, Italy). He said, among other things, "My wish is that you bring love to today's world which is so much in need of it, and through that love, God.... I see that you authentically follow the vision of the Church, the self-definition of the Church given in the Second Vatican Council." ►

1984 - Chiara Lubich is honored with the Byzantine Cross by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Orthodox Church, Demetrios I.
- Chiara founds the Youth for Unity Movement, to involve as many boys and girls as possible to work towards a united world.
- International Congress on Economy and Work in Rome.
- School for dialogue with the contemporary culture has its first session at the Mariapolis Center in Rocca di Papa.
- School for social studies "Igino Giordani" opens in the Mariapolis Aracoeli in Sao Paolo, Brazil.

1985 - The '85 Genfest with 20,000 participants in Rome Sports Arena, marks official beginning of "Youth for a United World Movement." Chiara encourages youth to live the Gospel as means to lead world to unity.
- Chiara returns to Japan at the invitation of the Archbishop of Tokyo to address Japanese Catholic Youth, to visit the Focolare Community, and to participate in the ceremonies for the 70th Birthday of Nikkyo Niwano, president of the Rissho Kosei Kai, a Buddhist lay movement.
- Chiara is invited by Pope John Paul II to participate as auditor in the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops.

1986 - World Congress of the Parish Movement takes place in Rome. Pope John Paul II addresses the assembly.
- Inauguration of the Ecumenical Mariapolis Center in Trent, Italy.
- Inauguration of the Permanent Mariapolis Luminosa at Hyde Park, New York.

A TREE

The Focolare Movement—as Pope Paul VI said some years ago—is a tree which is rich and very fruitful.

"At the core of the Movement are little communities of a new style called Focolare, made up of men or women, who are joined, inasmuch as is possible, by married people who strongly desire holiness." (As of February 1986 there are 447 Focolare houses in over 44 countries, with a total of 3,826 focolarini).

"Among the most committed lay people, after the Focolarini, come the Volulnteers. They live in their own homes, and live the same spirit, with set commitments." They number 9,100 among men and women.

"The Movement crossed frontiers: first it spread to all the countries of Europe, then from 1958 onwards it spread in an extraordinary way to more than 100 countries and hundreds of thousands of people.

In those years many branches were born from the one tree.

"By 1967 around the married Focolarini thousands and thou-

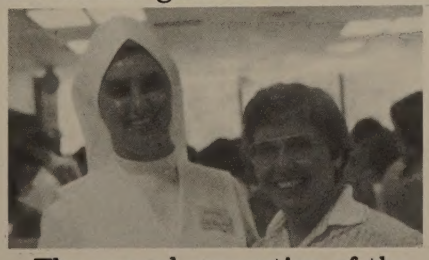
WITH MANY BRANCHES

sands of families had found new vigor, new relationships between partners, unity between parents and children: adoptions became more frequent.... The New Family Movement was born.

"Around the Volunteers, who want to animate the world of education, medicine, art and science and every expression of human life with the spirit of Christ (like the yeast in the dough)—the New Humanity Movement was born.

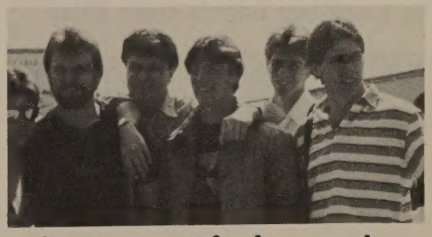
"Around the priests who have taken this spirit as their own—the Priests' Movement had grown, and many new vocations flourish." These diocesan priests now number 14,000. "Those who are parish priests animate the life of their parishes so as to make this cell of the Church an ecclesial family in accordance with the living example of the early community in Jerusalem. All these parishes together form the Parish Movement.

"Our spirit has deeply penetrated also in many religious congregations and orders of men and women. The fruits are: renewal of the community, rediscovery of the founder's charism, revaluation of the rules, and new members." The number of men are 10,000 and they belong to 82 different religious orders. The sisters associated with the Focolare number 44,600, 269 of which are mother generals.



The second generation of the Focolare—the Gen (New Generation)—numbers about 30,000 young men and women"who commit themselves in a total way, make up the Gen units, and communicate their life to tens of thousands of other young people. Committed to the life of the Gospel, they go against the current in a world disturbed by protest, drugs, sex, and juvenile crime. They promote the unity of all peoples and unity between generations. By the witness of their experience of life and through songs, mime and dance, they launch the message of the Gospel among young people in every continent with exceptional results."

The gen seminarians throughout the world number 3,000. The Youth for a United World Movement, animated by the Gen, numbers 250,000.



A movement for boys and girls was born all over the world: the Gen 3 (from ages 8 to 14) and the younger ones called Gen 4 (from 3 to 8)."At times they truly have something to teach adults. With great love they help children younger than themselves to live the Gospel. The Gen 3 are the animators of a mass movement for boys and girls their age, called The Youth for Unity Movement."

(excerpts from Chiara Lubich's acceptance speech Templeton Prize, '77)

A branch united to the vine

"Grace was prompting us to see each neighbor—classmate or beggar, sales clerk or politician, infant or invalid—in a new way. We learned to recognize that each was a member of the Mystical Body, to be loved as such. And we learned to recognize and love Christ in each person.

So it was, that those who could have been an obstacle to us in our journey toward God, became instead a help.

It was just as the Scriptures had promised: "We have passed out of death and into life, and of this we can sure because we love our brothers" (1 Jn. 3:14).

The more we loved Christ in everyone, empty of ourselves, the more our hearts were filled with God. And when we recollected ourselves in the evening to pray, it was easier for the Lord to make his gentle presence felt in our hearts.

This experience made us realize how much it pleases God when we love, and showed us that to love one another as brothers and sisters was the quintessence of the Gospel.

In some of our brothers, however, we were not only to love God but also to obey him. One day we read in the Gospel the words Jesus addressed to those he had just chosen to be his co-workers: "He who hears you hears me" (Lk. 10:16). And we understood that the one who could tell us if we were on the right track or not was our bishop. So we went to see him and told him everything. The bishop exclaimed: "Here I see the hand of God!" And he encouraged us to go ahead."

Thus Chiara describes unity with the Church at the beginning of the Movement in the book, "May they all be one."

Throughout the years when speaking about its expansion she would particularly attribute it to two things: the close unity with the ecclesiastical authorities—as branches united to the vine—and the unity we have tried to have with one another.

(left) Pope Paul VI with a family of the Movement in 1972.

March 10, 1971. In a general audience Pope Paul VI greeted a group from the Focolare and the following is an excerpt of his words about the Movement to the crowd in St. Peter's Square.

"... We admire how they have expanded, We have seen how the Focolare has grown and spread throughout all of Europe and beyond and we see that wherever they are they have characteristics which give us great pleasure.

First of all is their faithfulness to Christ, to the fire of the Lord, to the charity of Christ that they want to have for themselves and give to others. Secondly we admire their faithfulness to the Church. They are not like groups which may be worthy and good but which separate themselves and act on their own almost as if they had little to do with that large family—organized and structured as the Lord wanted—the Catholic Church. Instead they are faithful to the Church. May God bless them.

August 19, 1985. Pope John Paul II visits the international headquarters of the Focolare near Rome. He expressed his wish for the Movement: "Grow and multiply."

Here follows Chiara's description of her tremendous experience participating as auditor at the recent Synod of Bishops.

"The Synod was a tremendous and irreplaceable experience of Church for me. During the first three days almost all the bishops spoke and I felt I was immersed in a particular and unique atmosphere.

As I listened to bishops of every culture and nationality speak I experienced the universal Church, I understood in a special way what catholicity is. It is not just a word. It is not only internationality. It is universality.

I experienced the Church as one. There was no right and left. You didn't sense different currents and tendencies. Everyone was there to build the one Church. The concern was one of implementing the Council as much as possible. Whenever one bishop had an observation to make about another, he would first emphasize the positive aspects of what that person had said with the sincerity of those who love. Mutual love was truly present among them.

Since there was unity and universality, I experienced a joyful Church. When I read what the newspapers had to say about the Synod, I couldn't even recognize the Synod in what they wrote. They couldn't convey the soul of the Church.

I experienced also that the Church is holy. I remember that at one point looking at all these bishops I sensed an atmosphere of sanctity. The Holy Spirit was present there. It's true that we are all sinners, therefore the bishops as well, but there you could touch with your own hands that all together if we are Church, we are the holy Church.

I experienced also that the Church is apostolic. The bishops truly were the successors of the Apostles. They directed all their efforts towards safeguarding the patrimony of the Church (to defend the authority of the Pope and collegiality, for example). They were people anointed by Someone. I experienced the Church as Sacrament.

I experienced the Church as the Body of Christ which continues throughout the centuries. Certainly the Church could also be seen as an institution but the mystery of what the Church is as well—Body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit—came through very powerfully.

Something that strongly stands out from the Synod is that the Council will remain the magna carta of the Church of the third millenium and therefore it should be studied, explored, and lived. We feel we are in perfect harmony, fully a part of what took place, and committed to it. None of the topics feel foreign to our lives. This can be due to the fact that we either are now beginning to, or we already do, work in some of the areas dealt with in the Synod and because we feel that our Movement has the features of the post-Conciliar Church." □

(above) One of the forty-five ecumenical meetings sponsored by the Focolare up to the present and held at the Mariapolis Center near Rome.

"The more we live the Gospel the closer we will be drawn together because we become more similar to Christ."

So said the late Cardinal Bea, former head of the Secretariat for Christian Unity on the occasion of the inauguration of the Ecumenical Permanent Mariapolis in Ottmaring, Germany.

"The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian churches.

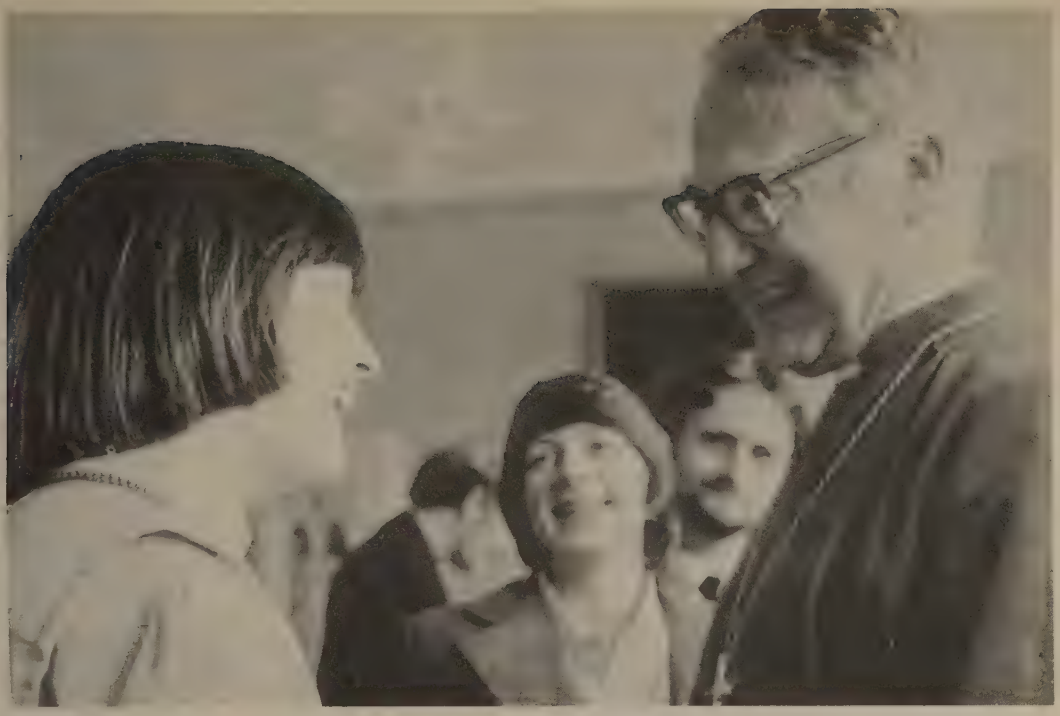
This is how it happened. As usual we had no plan. Three German Lutheran pastors were present at a small speech I gave in a convent of the Marienschwestern,[1] and their reaction was "What? Are Catholics living the Gospel?" And they arranged at once with my friends to introduce this life to their brotherhoods, groups, and Lutheran parishes in Germany.

Centuries old prejudices collapsed on both sides. The Lutherans understood many things. We admired in them their love of Scripture and their spirit of prayer. They wanted to deepen the new life which they wished to share with us at least in part. And they came to Rome almost every year for an ecumenical meeting.

At a certain point, meetings were not enough, and we decided to start a center for common life for members of the two traditions at Ottmaring, near Augsburg, precisely where in 1530, the divisions between Lutherans and Catholics were affirmed. The permission of the Catholic bishop was encouraging, as was that of the Lutheran bishop. Around this center the little town is developing which was already mentioned. And also other groups of Lutherans, Baptists, and members of the Free Church from the north and the south of Germany meet there together. They have adopted the spirit of the Focolare Movement, while remaining faithful to their churches.

Some Anglican clergy and laity were enthusiastic about this experience and they wished to bring it to the Church of England. In 1966, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Doctor Ramsey, received me in an audience. He concluded by saying that he saw God's hand in this Movement and he invited me to bring this spirit to Anglican groups. Today the Focolare Movement is living and growing among Anglicans all over the United Kingdom.

In Switzerland and Holland the Movement is alive among many members of the Reformed Church. The words of Jesus which they too emphasize, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them," (Mt. 18:20), make them feel an affinity with us. We have also gotten to know the Prior of Taize,[2] and established a friendship with him, and also with some of the various personalities of the World Council of Churches. In North America where the Movement has been since 1960, there are many Christians of different denominations who share our spirit.



1981. Dr. Robert Runcie, head of the Anglican Church, meets a group of Anglican members of the Focolare.

On June 13, 1967, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I, invited me to meet him. He had heard something about us, but wanted to know more. It is impossible to describe how attached he was to the Movement. He emphasized love and life above all. I made several journeys to Istanbul over the next five years. My visits had the aim of keeping him informed, but above all of healing the deep wound of the incomplete unity with Rome. The circumstances were not yet ripe. Athenagoras was one of the greatest men of our age. Yet he wanted to be, as he put it, "a simple member of this Movement." Like a prophet he foretold: "The day will come, the sun will rise high, the angels will sing and dance, and all of us, Bishops and Patriarchs, will be around the Pope celebrating with the one chalice." It is through him that the Focolare Movement was born and is spreading among the Orthodox, especially in the Near East."

(excerpts from Chiara Lubich's acceptance speech Templeton Prize, '77)

(left) "Patriarch Athenagoras was the one who revealed to us the beauty of the Orthodox Church." Chiara is seen here with the Patriarch during one of her trips to Istanbul to meet with him.

(below) 1983. Chiara met with Patriarch Dimitrios I, head of the Greek Orthodox Church, in Istanbul for the second time and he presented her with a Byzantine Cross which is given only on rare special occasions.

1) Lutheran nuns in Darmstadt, Germany; 2) Brother Roger Schutz, Prior of the Swiss Protestant Churches Federation based in Taize, France.

"THE SOUL OF THE WORLD"

The spreading of the Movement all over the world has brought it in contact with members of other religions.

"With the faithful of the noble and tortured Jewish people dialogue is easy. We share with them part of Revelation. We are grateful to them for having given us a Jewish Jesus, Jewish Apostles. And Mary too was Jewish.

In the Moslems we admire their tenacious love for religion. They are an example to us. The mystic of the Islamic tradition Al-Hallaj, wrote "In His essence (in the essence of God), love is the essence of essences."

In Asia we met Buddhists. It is good for our soul to remember the words of Buddha: "Like a mother who even at risk to her own life watches and protects her only son, so with a great soul we must ... love the whole world...."

The words of the Indian mystic Ramakrishna strike us: "Only love matters. Have love for everyone: nobody is any different from you. God lives in everyone and nothing exists without him."

We are in contact with Hindus and also with Shintoists.

The dialogue which the members of the Movement established with these brothers of other religions is not made up of words. We love them as they are, interested in everything that concerns their religious life. Our love is returned and meetings are held which are often large, in which the concern of everyone is to seek together the truths which most unite us in order to live them together and to share experiences which show our interest in God and our brothers. This interest has spread more and more widely. The faithful of the great religions, when they come into contact with the Movement, sense that a new current of love runs through the world, and they like to call themselves according to what they feel deep inside themselves: Moslem Gen, or Buddhist Volunteers or Gen, and so on.

(excerpts from Chiara Lubich's acceptance speech Templeton Prize, '77)

(left) April 1977. Chiara was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. In Guild Hall, London, during the award ceremony.

(left) December 1981. Chiara's first trip to Japan has authoritatively been called "a milestone in Catholic—Buddhist relations." Here Chiara and members of the Focolare pose with Nikkyo Niwano, president of the lay Buddhist association, the Rissho Kosei-kai, and some of its members.

August 1984. the fourth World Conference of Religions for Peace took place in Nairobi, Kenya. 600 delegates, including world reknown religious leaders from 60 countries, met to discuss "Religions for Human Dignity and World Peace. The following are excerpts of Chiara's message which was read to the assembly by Natalia Dalla Piccola.

In the world today there is a real thrust towards unity. It is a sign of the times, which can give us an insight into the plan God has for humanity today.

This intuition, this view of things, tells us that we are not alone in wanting universal brotherhood and therefore peace. For although unity has been God's will since the very creation of the world, it is also his specific wish for this, our twentieth century, as well as for the new century about to begin.

Thus, in working in this direction we are in harmony with God's will, and if this is so, his help and grace will not be lacking, also in this immense task to which we have pledged our efforts: unity among Religions for the sake of peace.

We all believe in Someone or in something which transcends us. We al believe in God, or in a truth, which for us Christians bears a name: Father. He is the foundation of universal brotherhood. We cannot believe in a father without acting as brothers and sisters toward every human being.

With him we can effectively contribute to *universal brotherhood,* which means contributing to a secure *peace.* Looking to him we see all persons as potential candidates for this brotherhood, regardless of race or nation, ideology or creed.

My wish is that this Conference may bring a new contribution towards peace in the world.

My wish is also that this Conference may give impetus to the decision to act towards every other human being in that manner called *love.* That each individual—the greatest number possible—may love his neighbor as himself; that this love become service; that this service be expressed concretely in each person "making himself one" with others: in making himself weak with the weak, ignorant with those who lack learning or instruction, suffering with those who suffer, in making himself all things to all men, in order that many may be drawn into this same current of love. And that God the Father, for this love which binds brothers and sisters together, may somehow feel impelled to come and dwell among us.

Then he will be in the midst of us all, also here in Nairobi, in this open dialogue, sustained by the respect and the mutual love among members of different religions. And he will surely suggest sound proposals and effective initiatives in view of this year's program, which is centered on human dignity and world peace.

Surely he will make us experience, for the Religion which elevates us all, that spiritual unity which binds everyone together and which can become more and more the *soul of the world,* the soul of humanity today. □

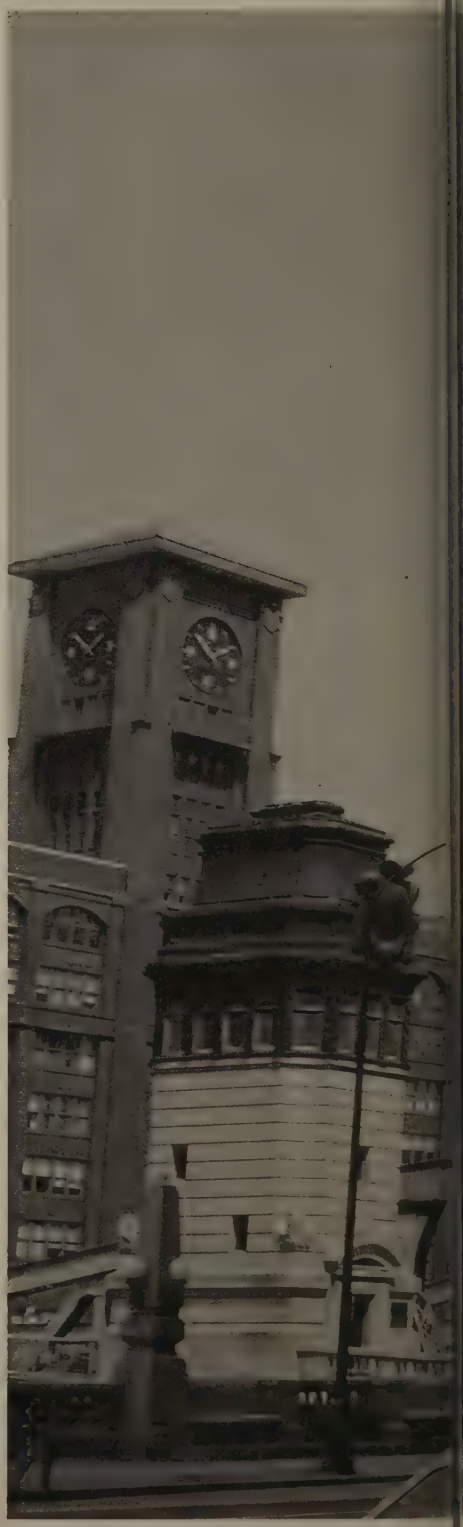
This is the great attraction
of our times:
to penetrate to the highest contemplation,
while remaining in the midst of people,
shoulder to shoulder,
as one among many.

To merge oneself with the crowd
in order to infuse a divine element into it,
as wine that gradually
soaks a piece of bread.

As participants in God's plans
for humanity,
to scatter glimmering points of light
among the crowds,
while sharing with our neighbor
his shame, his hunger,
his troubles and brief joys.

The attraction of our times,
as of all times,
is that which is, simultaneously,
most human and most divine:
Jesus and Mary.
A carpenter... the Word of God;
a housewife... the Seat of Wisdom.

Chiara Lubich



The world from the angle of unity

Interviewers have on different occasions asked Chiara her views on the Movement and on issues and problems of our time. Here are some of her answers.

Could you tell us when you first thought of founding a Movement?

I never thought of or had a desire to found a movement. Most likely, the incentive came from another source. It would be impossible for such a vast movement reaching over 150 countries to have been initiated by just one person no matter how many excellent qualities he or she may have and having all these qualities is absolutely not my case.

No, it all began in this way. It was during the war and we saw everything crumble. All our ideals and dreams fell apart. For example, I was supposed to continue my university studies and that became impossible, one friend wanted to set up a beautiful home but it was destroyed; another friend awaited her fiance but he never returned from the war. As young as we were, there was within us—within me—a desire to chose an ideal that would never die out, that not even the bombs could destroy. From within we felt there did exist such as ideal and this ideal was God. We wanted to live consistently with this ideal and we understood, we remembered the sentence of Scripture, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." And so we said, "to love God then doesn't mean so much to invoke him, to call out to him, but rather to do his will."

Since we could have died from one moment to the next during the continual bombings, we met as many as eleven times a day in the shelters to seek refuge and we asked ourselves: "Is there a will of God that summarizes all that Jesus brought on earth, one that is truly pleasing to him and that if we should die having lived it, we would have done something? We remembered that Jesus spoke of a commandment which was new and his because he brought it. It was, "Love one another as I have loved you." To love with his measure of love. We looked at one another (we were seven girls between fifteen and twenty-three years of age) and said, "We will be, we will try to be the fulfillment of this new commandment." This communion, this unity among us, started here. This unity carries within it an extraordinary reality: the presence of Christ. A greater strength comes as a result of his presence because, as it is written, "Where charity and love abides there God abides," and where two or more are united in his name, there is God, there is Christ among them. We always tried to be faithful and live being ready to give our lives for one another. This is how Jesus loved us and, therefore, this is how we should love each other in order for Christ to be among us.

All our trust lies here, in him, and not in ourselves, not in numbers, for example. In him is our trust.

Did you ever think of becoming a nun?

I didn't think of it because I was called to something else. The thought passed through my mind, at one time, that as a nun I could give everything to God. I realized however that giving everything to God did not mean what I thought was best, for example, to take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, it meant rather, to give everything to God in the way he wanted. God's plan for me (which my confessor confirmed) was to stay in the world and bring ahead this new life which was later understood to be a charism that God was bringing about in the Church.

In all that you say, you speak of love, and at the center of the Movement there is this phrase of Christ: "Love one

nother as I have loved you." Also the world talks a lot bout love. People want to love nd above all, be loved. Can ou tell me what kind of love it s you speak of?

I am speaking of the love hat comes from above. There s a lot of love in the world and . lot of love which is sacred ike maternal love, paternal ove, the love of a child for its arents, nuptial love: they are eautiful, holy things. But here is a love which Jesus rought, the one the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts. It s the great gift that Jesus has given to us. When he speaks of gift, of springs of living water, he is speaking about this love. It is a participation in God's same love. God is love and by means of baptism and the Christian life we live, we can participate in this love. This love which is God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So when I speak of love, I am referring to this love which potentiates all that is love in a person, in the human heart.

How does the Movement participate in the life of the Church?

By bringing to it, its particular charism. You know that there are many charisms in the Church. There are particular charisms, like for example, that of the ecclesiastical authorities who have the charism to guide the Church. The Holy Spirit raises up many charisms (as in the time of St. Paul) which have different functions and are like injections you give to a body.

The injection, so to say, that the Movement gives to the body, to the mystical body of Christ which is the Church, is an injection of unity, an injection of love, of mutual love. With this injection, the Church, the members of the Church, discover that they are more one with each other, so that the Church shows itself to be not what many think i.e., only a ►

Genfest '85 in Rome marked the beginning of the Youth for a United World Movement. 165 young people from North America attended.

hierarchical structure, or who knows what—but rather the entire people of God in pilgrimage, a people united in love.

What, in your opinion, is the real suffering of today's world? Society often attributes it to lack of money, lack of satisfaction on the job, or in the family. What do you think?

I think that materialism, the indifference to religion and the attempt to exclude all religious influence have had a detrimental effect on society. The human person is no longer him or her self, what he or she was meant to be. God created humanity in a specific way. The human person should have vision, having been created as the "you" of God. Now materialism turns people away from God. As a result, people suffer because they are no longer themselves; they are less than their real selves, having lost their true identity.

If people were to find God again, they would be happy of a life in communion with him. It is precisely this communion with God that completely fulfills a person. Naturally this communion grows in proportion to how much we do what God wants, that is, in proportion to how much we love our neighbor. Like a little plant, the deeper it sends its roots, the taller it will grow. It's the same for us: the more we love our neighbor, the more we do the will of God, the more we experience union with God, communion with him. These are the two things toward which we should strive if we are to be ourselves. This way we become—we are—authentic Christians, authentic, complete persons. Otherwise we will never be fully satisfied. We should take a deeper look at the real reasons why people get involved with drugs and other things. Some people seem to have everything: money and the like. Still they are not happy; they look for happiness and don't realize that there is a joy which is the joy that Jesus brought. Jesus speaks of his joy as he speaks of his peace; and this joy has its source in communion with him.

"...all would feel like brothers and sisters and everything produced in the world would be the result of the work of a family." (right) Loppiano, the farming cooperative and (below) the ceramic arts center.

You have said that work often has an alienating character which provokes frustration and dissatisfaction. Why do you think that is so?

There are many reasons for this, but the main one is that at the stage of industrialization we have reached, workers handle only a piece or detail of the whole without seeing the final product of the work of their hands, of their intelligence, of their creativity.

I think that one of the ways to overcome this problem would

be for all of us to be so "one", for example, for all workers to be so one with each other and also with the managers, that workers could see the final product as also being theirs. Not only the economic benefits which derive should be shared, but also workers should be able to take pride in the accomplishments of their place of work as if they were their own.

I know of places, of factories, where people live and work with this attitude. Although their work is repetitious, working on piece after piece, they are so enthusiastic about what the factory produces that you would say: "Well, then if this problem can be resolved on a small scale, why can't it be done on a large scale?" The people I am speaking about try to live as Christians.

This is why I think it is so necessary for all people to love one another without excluding anyone. All would feel like brothers and sisters and everything that is produced in the world be the fruit of the work of a family. Then everyone would be happy. That is why even, let's say, the tenth child in a family can be happy because he feels that his mother, the things in the house, the family possessions, what the mother buys, etc., are his. Even if he's one of ten, he considers everything as his own because he is in a family. The world needs to become a family again.

How can this be accomplished?

It can be accomplished by living the words of Jesus. He said, "By this will all know that you are my disciples if you love one another." This is what should characterize Christians and not other things like, for example, going to Mass even though it is very important. Mutual love must be the distinguishing characteristic. Naturally, though, to re-establish mutual love among Christians and with everyone, God must be given the right place by Christians and possibly all people. God should come first and God is Love! And in order to do so, to have God as the ideal of our lives, we need to repeat in our lives what he does: we, too, need to be love for everyone.

(interview by Italian Radio-TV Network, June 1984)

What significance does the encounter with Christ have for youth today?

First of all, I think that Christ is for youth what he is for everyone.

We know that Christ came on earth to reveal to mankind what the human person really is, to make us understand God's intention in creation giving us the possibility of returning to his original plan. God who is love made mankind similar to himself giving it the capacity to love, the capacity to enter into communion with him. He created the human person as one who could stand before him, who could be the "you" of God.

But mankind, instead of loving God back and thereby becoming one with God, wanted to be God, and believed itself self-sufficient. In so doing, mankind forgot God, lost the Father and no longer recognized the rest of humanity as brothers and sisters. There then arose hatred, murder, competition, wars, racial discrimination ... and in the human person's innermost being arose anguish, fear, desperation, confusion.

However, love urged God to save his creature. This is how Jesus entered history. With his teaching and by giving his life, he enabled humanity to reacquire its original dignity, giving us the potential to become children of God. Jesus divinized humanity. He enabled mankind to again become its real self. ►

Therefore, also for young people, to encounter Christ means to find their own identity, to initiate the way towards their fulfillment.

Christ exerts a very special fascination on young people, though. Since they are not as yet too attached to this world, they can understand him better, they are attracted by his authenticity.

And since young people often seek an ideal to live for and hypocrisy and half-way measures are not their style, when they encounter Christ, they recognize in him the mold, the example of the human person, they discover their model, their leader and they follow him.

(March '84 interview by Savonarola for Pontifical Council of Laity)

Which are the aspects you would like the Movement to be known for?

There is such a great need for unity in our times—unity, which is another name for peace—that I would want the Movement to be known for what it is. The goal of the Movement is to contribute to the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer: "That all may be one." Its aim is, therefore, to revive unity among Catholics, to work towards its achievement with all Christians, and to arrive at the greatest possible unity with members of all the various religions and with all people of good will.

You live the spirituality of the Movement and insist that the "focolarini" do the same. This may have been called "spiritualism" at times. How do you respond to this?

Our spirituality is fundamental for us. By means of it we can establish the presence of Jesus among people even in the midst of the world. When a person loves (and our spiritual way is a way of love) and this love becomes mutual, the words of Jesus come true "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). It is because of this presence of Jesus in the community (as well as because of his presence in individuals) that we can hope to be guided by him when we act alone or together. As a result what is accomplished is not simply human but supernatural, as well. This is extremely important for a movement in the Church.

But the presence of Jesus among us, which is the fruit of living our spirituality, is only the basis for our every action. Then there is all that the Movement does among the youth, among families, in the different fields of society, in the Church. There are publishing houses, "mini-cities" which give their own witness, schools of social studies, of ecumenism, and for the dialogue with the contemporary culture. All of this indicates how concrete the life of the Movement is.

Loppiano, Italy is one of the eight mini-cities of the Focolare around the world.

You participated as an auditor at the recent Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on Vatican II and its application. What will be the main consequences of this Synod for the Focolare? What reflections have been made? Do you foresee corrections, adjustments in any areas of the Movement's activities? Did you find a confirmation of what the Movement is already doing?

My participation in the Synod has given us a burning desire to keep the Second Vatican Council always more alive in the Movement. For this reason, we plan to do a systematic and in-depth study of it both here at the center of the Movement and everywhere the Movement is found.

Since the Movement is structured and finalized in great harmony with Vatican II, even though it began twenty years before the opening of the Council, we see no need to change anything. Rather we feel affirmed in many aspects, mostly in the dialogues which we have been carrying on for years with Christians of other traditions, with the faithful of other religions and with those who do not believe.

Can you tell us about some initiative of the Movement which is particularly interesting because of its characteristic or geographical location?

An initiative which draws tens of thousands of people each year are the little ideal cities that we have built or are in the process of building in different parts of the world. We are talking about men and women of all ages, vocations, nationalities and races who, in the same locality, try to live the Gospel, especially Jesus' new commandment in their daily work (often in little industries or work in the fields), in prayer, and in study.

These little cities are located in Loppiano in the Tuscan region of Italy, in Ottmaring, West Germany near Augsburg, in Montet, Switzerland near Fribourg, in Fontem, Cameroon, Africa. There are also little cities in O'Higgins, Argentina and in San Paolo, Brazil. Others are in the process of being built in the Philippines and the United States.

They are true cities on the mountain top which bear witness to the truth of Jesus' words, "By this love you have for one another everyone will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35).

It is impossible to count the number of persons who have been touched by the life lived in these cities and who, as a consequence, discover or rediscover God and the Church.

When, years from now, you will not be here anymore, how would you like to be remembered? ►

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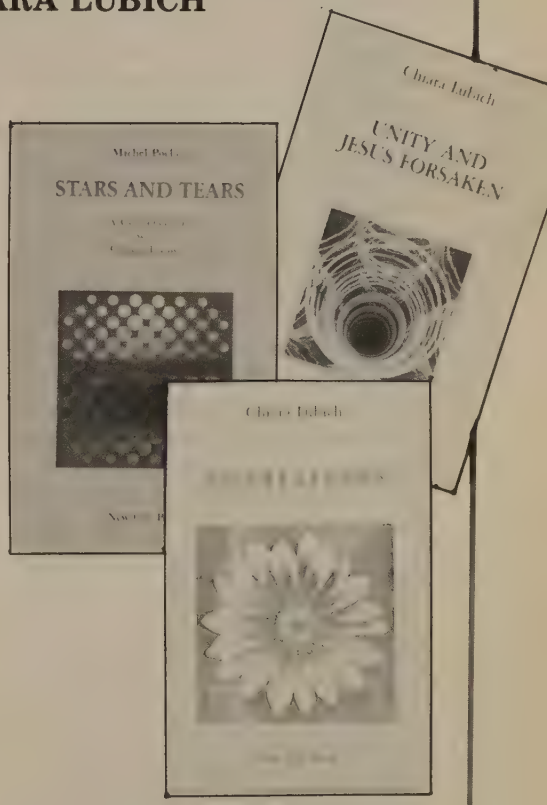

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I would like to be remembered for faithfulness to my Ideal, i.e., to Jesus Crucified and Forsaken, key to the unity of individuals with God and with one another, and I would like to be remembered for faithfulness to Mary, the real leader and guide of our Movement, for faithfulness to the Church.

(interview by Jorge Molinero for "Palabra" magazine n. 252, Madrid, July 1986)

If you were trying to tell an ordinary person, Christian or non-Christian, exactly what love is, what illustration would you use? Would you say it is a feeling? Or is it something which is expressed in action? Or both?

Love is, above all, sacrificing oneself for others; but it is also a sentiment. It is also the effort to make oneself one with the will of another, to make oneself one with the other. A prototype, on a human level, that could be a symbol of divine love is a mother's love. A mother if filled with the sentiment of love, and her life is characterized by much sacrifice for her children. She is the one who most understands her children and tries to make herself one with them. God has a love of this kind, but, his is much greater.

Do you feel that it's possible to live a genuinely joyful, relaxed, and peaceful life, in terms of your inner life, in todays's high-pressured urban environment?

Yes, And I would like to tell you how we find this joy and this inner peace while remaining in the midst of the world, with the noise of telephones, cars, TV, and all the usual clamor. But first, I would like to recount an episode which led us to the key for resolving this problem.

It was the beginning of our new life, and I had gone to visit a friend of mine who was sick. A priest who was there to give her the Eucharist asked me, "Do you know when it was that Jesus suffered the most?" And I answered, "Perhaps it was in the Garden of Olives." At that time, in fact, this was the common belief. The priest answered, "No, Jesus suffered the most when on the cross he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When the priest left the room, I turned to my sick friend and to whomever else was there with me and said: "If Jesus suffered the most in his abandonment, then we who want to follow him crucified should choose him as our Ideal in the moment when he cried, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' We have only one life; let's choose to live it for him!"

I said this because I had great faith in the priesthood: what came from the lips of a priest was taken by me as if it came from God.

From that moment on, all suffering—whether personal, or that of our brothers and sisters, our small community, the Church, or humanity—seemed to us an expression of his suffering, the suffering of Jesus Forsaken.

"Crucifixion" by Ave Cerquetti. Centro Ave, Loppiano.

In all the manifestations of uffering we beheld his coun- enance, especially in spiritual uffering. So when we experi- nced an inner sadness, for in- tance, or aridity, or lack of eace, or the burden of our ins, or a sense of failure, we would find a deeper meaning or all these personal sufferings n his cry.

For, in the moment of his abandonment, Jesus was left in darkness. It seemed that he, who is the Truth, the Light of he world, could not see the Father anymore, the Father who had never abandoned him. In that moment he experienced he greatest possible aridity. He had lost the immense, di- vine joy of his union with the Father, and felt the burden of all our sins on his shoulders. He felt a failure; peace, tran- quility, and joy were banished rom his soul.

Thus, viewing our suffering as a participation in his, we would embrace him forsaken in hat suffering. And we would ay from the depths of our heart: "This is what I want, his is what I have chosen." Forgetting ourselves, we would plunge into this new adventure nd wholeheartedly begin to do whatever was God's will for us n the following moment. And very often, almost always, the ense of aridity and of being vithout light, peace, and tran- quility would disappear.

This is how we learned to overcome inner difficulties. But hat is not all. We also saw the ace of Jesus Forsaken in the xternal circumstances that were an obstacle to the peace, oy, and tranquility of our ouls. And so we would accept them and love them as an expression of Jesus—as Jesus. And in accepting and embracing them, we experienced the return of deep, supernatural peace and joy.

C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *Surprised by Joy,* in which he indicated that most of his life he had been looking for joy, then all of a sudden, it came to him from a different direction. A lot of other people are looking for peace and joy. From your words, it would seem that you experience quite a bit of both. How did you find them?

There are a peace and a joy which are not of this world. This is something one has to experience. We began to experience it at the beginning of the Movement when we decided to do God's will, to make our will one with his will. We tried to live like this moment by moment, instant by instant. This way of life brought us great joy and great peace, but a peace and joy that are not of this world—that the world does not experience. So, too, when we tried to put into practice Jesus' New Commandment as an expression of God's will, we experienced peace, joy, and light. These are fruits of the Spirit, and their presence is particularly noticeable when there is unity.

What could we suggest to those who want to experience this joy?

It is to be found in mutual love. We should teach everyone to love one another. When Jesus spoke about unity, he spoke of the fullness of joy. And it's really true!

As a woman, who is the leader of a large Christian group that has both men and women in it, do you feel any sort of tension or conflict with the Scriptural approach to the role of women?

From Scripture we see that Jesus chose men as teachers, priests, and guides, as in the case of Peter and the Apostles, and of Paul. But not only men followed Jesus. His mother, Mary, and other women disciples were very close to him. Mary was full of grace; and she was in the Cenacle on Pentacost.

Mary's first task was to give life to Jesus. She is Theotokos, "Mother of God," because she is mother of the Word made flesh. But this first task does not preclude her having had other tasks as well. She was close to the Apostles after Jesus' death. Jesus had entrusted her to John as his mother, and had entrusted John to her as her son. Certainly, Mary, who lived life fully, did not remain silent. She spoke, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit in her heart overflowed on those around her. We have an example of this in her meeting with Elizabeth, when Mary proclaimed the "Magnificat." Her service to the Church was not the same as that of the Apostles, who were to preach, to spread the word of God, to baptize, to found the Church. Her task was more the task of a mother, loving and supporting the Apostles and the infant Church. She did for the Church a little of what she had done for the child Jesus. ►

We think of Mary as filled with charisms. And certainly she made these bear fruit for the Church while she was still alive; otherwise, why would she have had them? It is true that there is not much about her in Scripture, but I believe that this was pre-ordained by Providence. For Mary was not meant to distract us, in even a minimal way, from giving our full attention to the figure of Jesus. Although she was his mother, at the same time she was simply a created human being.

If we look at her example, and think of her as a model—a model which no one can ever fully relive—we will be able to understand the other women who, throughout the Church's history, have received charisms from God for the good of the Church and of humanity. These charisms have revitalized the Mystical Body of Christ, bringing about a greater presence of the Holy Spirit in ways suited to the needs of the times. Thus these women are, in some way, mothers; just as men, so endowed, are fathers. And, in fact, these women have often given the Church new religious families.

All God's gifts are love, but they are also light. Frequently, therefore, these charisms also contain a doctrine; that is, a particular way of viewing the Gospel that is in accord with the interpretation given by the teaching Church. Thus, women who have received such a charism from God are teachers; and, at times, the Church even considers them Doctors of the Church—like St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Avila. Thus they teach; but their teaching is, above all, a ministry of love and service.

In the light of your own personal experience, and from the experience of others you have known in the Focolare Movement, how would you define spiritual maturity?

As Christ living permanently —insofar as that is possible here on earth—in the Christian.

What helps us mature spiritually; and what are signs or marks of spiritual maturity?

The sign is one's love of neighbor. From how much a person loves his or her neighbor, you can see how much he or she loves God. To go back to the other question, love of neighbor is what helps us to become mature, because love of neighbor makes our love for God grow. St. Teresa of Avila, whom you probably know of, and St. Catherine of Siena were also convinced of this.

The deeper a plant sends its roots into the earth, the higher it grows. Similarly, the more Christians "make themselves one" with others, the more they love others, the more their love for God increases. This was our experience from the very beginning.

The Lord was strongly urging us to love our neighbor, to love Jesus in him or her. We tried to live like this all day long, making ourselves one with all the persons we met, sharing their joys and their sufferings, making ourselves one with their aspirations, and so on. As a result, when evening came and we recollected ourselves in prayer, we began to experience certain union with God, even though we were at the beginning of our spiritual life.

Thus we experienced that love of neighbor makes our love for God grow. It is a wellspring of union with God.

(from "... an interview with Chiara Lubich" by William Proctor)

We all know that not withstanding the tensions of our contemporary world, between East and West, between the countries of the northern and southern hemispheres; the tensions present specifically in this part of the world, notwithstanding the threats of war, the explosion of the various phenomena of highjacking, terrorism, and other maladies of our present age, the world is tending toward unity.

It is a sign of the times.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian world tells us this is so. After centuries of indifference and conflict, we are currently witnessing the widespread resolve to reunite. We see this reflected in the recent Popes, like Paul VI, whose doctrine is permeated with the desire for unity, and John Paul II, who by his journeys throughout the world and his universal embrace toward all peoples, personifies this concept. The fact that Vatican II took place is another sign of our times to indicate the world is tending toward unity. Its documents repeatedly speak of it. We see it reflected in Vatican II's openness to the dialogue with other religions and all people of good will, and in its instituting sec-

Family Fest 1981. The convention of the New Family Movement gathered 25,000 people from all over the world. Pope John Paul II addressed the assembly.

retariats to foster dialogue. Even some ideologies, which we believers cannot share, aim at resolving the world's problems on a global scale. There are international organizations and associations which also reflect this interest. Then there are the communications media, which foster unity by bringing news from around the world into every home and community.

Yes, the world is tending toward unity. It is in this context that we must consider what the attitude of our families, our youth, of ourselves as Christians, should be.

It is with this view in mind that we should approach evangelization in Asia today.

We Christians can spotlight this gravitation of the world towards unity. We can bring our specific contribution through a supernatural unity which was the ultimate dream of Jesus: "Father, that they may be one. That all may be one."

We are all already united because of the life of grace given to us at baptism. What is necessary, however, is that this divine life within us become externally visible.

How?

Through mutual love lived intensely. The love that characterized the first Christians can—even in our times—manifest itself as powerful force in this immense continent which, for the most part, does not yet know Christ.

The fact is that if we seriously love one another in a spirit of mutual service like Jesus, our Lord and Master, who washed the feet of his disciples, if we love one another ready as he was, to die for one another, and if we place this love at the basis of our life, Christ himself will be present among us. He, in fact, said, "I will be with you all days until the end of the world," and "Where two or three are united in my name, I am there in their midst."

Yes, Jesus is present among those who love one another. Unity conveys him, manifests him, reveals him to the world. It is from this unity that the world recognizes him. Then if he is present, we have nothing more to fear. If he is present, we can hope for everything.

Yes, even the evangelization of Asia. In Asia so many are good, are religious, are spontaneously led toward eternal values. If they truly meet him, they could not fail to recognize him.

What are we to do, then?

First of all, we should count on Christian youth. They are the Asia of tomorrow.

We should entrust to them the task to spiritually bring Jesus to life in their gatherings with friends, in schools, on the sports field, everywhere.

We should tell them that if the love that comes from above burns in their hearts and makes them one, if they nourish themselves with the Eucharist, with the Word of God, and are united to their bishops, than they will be able to undertake this adventure of bringing Christ into the midst of the world.

The same can be said of families, those little Churches, as the Holy Father calls them. If they maintain among the various family members the presence of Christ by means of love, respect, mutual selfgiving, between father and mother, parents and children, grandchildren and grandparents, etc., then every family will truly be a little Church.

As such, these families will be ready to carry out the missionary task, which is not the duty of priests only, but of the entire people of God.

In this way, we make Christ present in schools, offices, factories, companies; everywhere.

Then with Christ spiritually alive among Christians, we will witness miracles of grace because he knows how to bring miracles about.

As a well-known Cardinal once said, today the world does not listen to teachers as much as to witnesses. And, if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are first witnesses.

(interview with Chiara by Radio Veritas, Manila, January, 1982)

UNITY

Our ideal is unity and nothing else....
We have to chose God in the way he wants to be chosen, love him by concretely working towards the fulfillment of his last prayer. We must do his will, which in our case means unity; love, by "making ourselves one" with our neighbor; love one another to the point of being perfected in one. We must embrace Jesus Forsaken who is, the key to unity and has therefore always to be loved with unity in view. Live the Word of Life, having laid first the foundation of continuous mutual love for each other, living the Word as further nourishment for that love.

The Word too must serve unity, because unity stands at the summit of the thought of Christ, synthesizing and summarizing his commandments. This is what Jesus always had us understand. What God wants most of all from us, as the Movement of the Focolari—which at one time was also called the Movement of Unity—is that we give life to living cells everywhere,increasingly fervent, with Christ in their midst; more and more of them, so that we "set fires" far and wide in families, offices, factories, schools, parishes, monasteries, to feed a conflagration of the love of God in the Church and in society. It's not for nothing that we are called "focolarini" (people of fire) and our homes "focolari" (fireplaces). Only by living in this way can we be certain of being on the right track. Even though in some places or nations we may be only a "small flock," we are still authentic, belonging to him, and oriented toward the "ut omnes" ("that they may all be one").

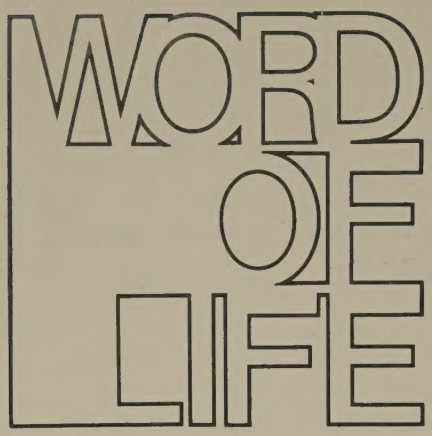
God's agenda for the Focolare has been this from the outset: reach out to one's own enviroment, perfecting one's own neighbors in unity while maintaining openness to everyone.

"Your first responsibility," one of the letters written at the beginning of the Movement says, "is to see to it that all of your brothers are one, without excluding other neighbors whom God places near you. Die...completely in the Jesus among you! Have everything in common...then Jesus will perfect your brothers who live alongside you, one by one, and will prepare those far away for unity. Just as every object which floats near a whirlpool in a sea or lake is irreparably drawn by the vortex so every person who meets Jesus (Jesus among us) will be lost in his love irretrievably. My hope is that Jesus among you will cast his nets into the wide world and that the daily catch will be miraculous."

The way is Christ alive in the most perfect unity among us. The objective is: "that they may all be one."

CHIARA LUBICH

(from her book "Unity and Jesus Forsaken" published by New City Press)



"The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly Spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise."

(2 Tm. 1:7)

"The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly Spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise."

Timothy, the disciple to whom these words were addressed, was sent by Saint Paul to lead the community of Ephesus, and most likely was passing through a period of discouragement. The community of Ephesus was difficult. There were abuses to correct, erroneous ideas to denounce. To these external difficulties were added the personal ones of the disciple: a young age and a shy disposition which led him to avoid rather than face situations.

Saint Paul took the opportunity to remind him of the charism—the gift of grace—which he had received from God to carry out his ministry in the Church. This gift brought with it strength, love and wisdom.

Truly Timothy had need of courage in order to proclaim the gospel, and firmness in order to guide the community. It was to be a firmness exercised with amiability and wisdom, with prudence which would enable him to intervene at the right time and place, find the right words, and take the right course of action in every case and for every person.

"The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly Spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise."

These words, although originally directed to a person ordained to the ministry, are indirectly intended for every Christian. Everyone of us, in fact, whatever our position in life, is called to bring the spirit of the Gospel into the family, schools, places of work, and professional activities: to be a builder of the Church.

Each of us has received the grace, a particular gift, to be a witness to Christ in his or her own environment. Even if at times we are tempted to be ashamed of him and to pull back, this gift gives us the strength to face the inevitable difficulties and bear witness to Christ before the world.

"The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly Spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise."

This word of life, then, describes to us qualities that we, too, should possess. We, too, have need of strength, love and wisdom. We need courage in order to make our Christian presence felt in society, particularly where fundamental moral values are threatened. We need courage to overcome our timidity, our natural tendency to laziness, to isolate ourselves, to seek tranquility. We need to unmask the endless excuses with which we try to justify our fear of the difficulties and live by human respect alone.

We need courage. But our courage must be full of amiability, respect and understanding also for those who do not think as we do.

How can we arrive then at this marvelous Christian balance described here by Saint Paul? We need to rely on the presence of Jesus within us.

Ours, therefore, will not be a passive attitude before the situations that we encounter, but rather an active one. We will go towards others and make ourselves one with what the will of God askes of us, facing the duties our vocation requires of us, relying on the grace of Jesus which is in us.

If we do so, Jesus himself will develop in us always more the virtues we need in order to bear witness to him in the field of activity entrusted to us.

Chiara Lubich

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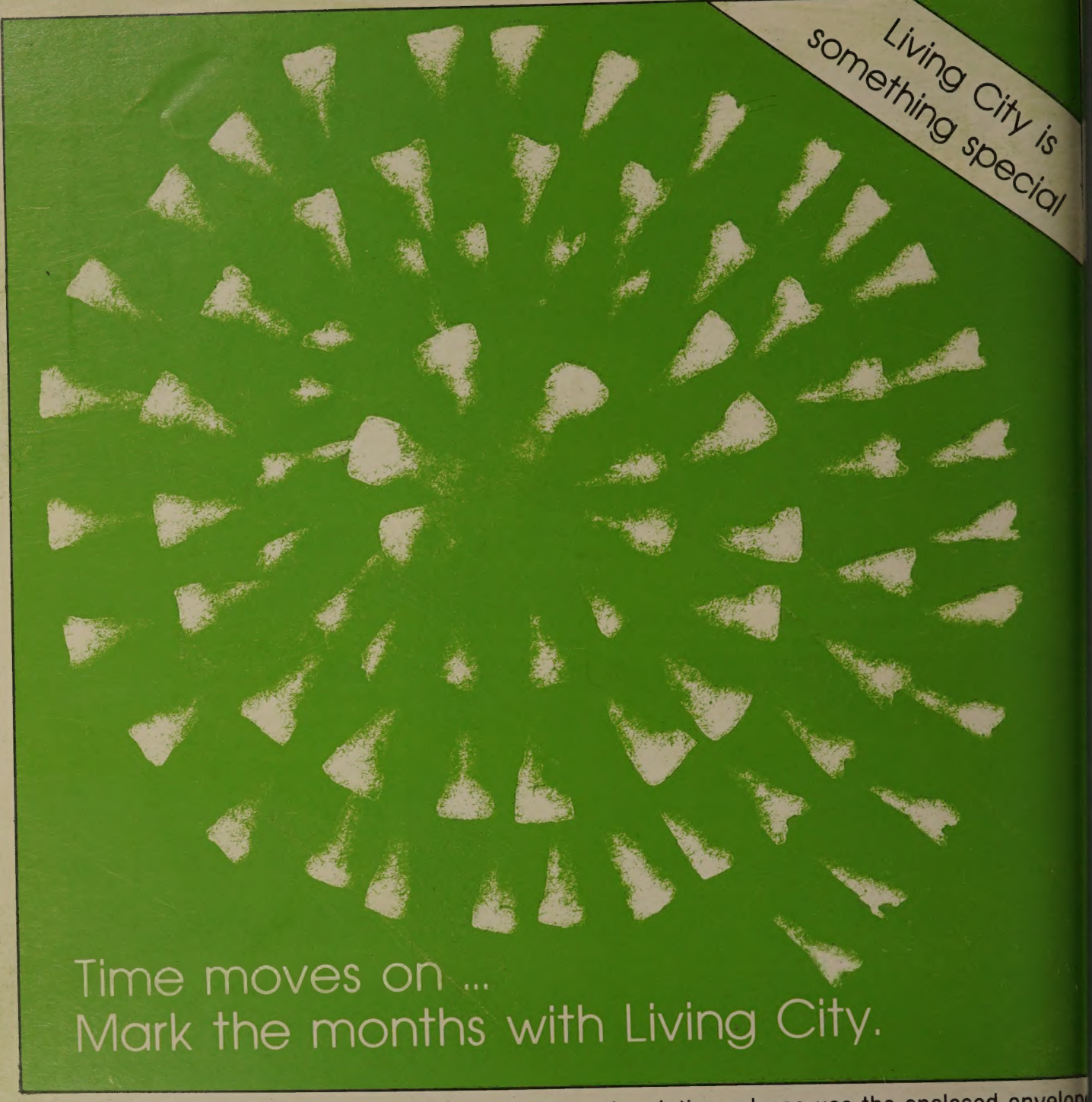

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